



## *Setting the Record Straight About School-to-Work Transition*

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**FICTION:** School-to-Work Transition is for students not headed for college.

**FACT:** Vocational classes historically served students who did not plan to go to college. However, today's high-skill job market demands much from high school graduates. They must have good reading, writing, communication, and math skills; they must excel at solving problems, and they must have work place skills and training. School-to-Work Transition focuses on improving the learning of *all* students through more interesting and relevant experiences. These experiences enable students to apply in real-world settings what they learn in class. And, they help all students: those who go directly to work after high school and those seeking degrees from two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

**FICTION:** Our schools already prepare students for college and careers.

**FACT:** Washington's schools have programs and courses to prepare students for college and careers. However, the traditional "drill and grill" method of educating young people is not preparing them for the changing demands and opportunities of modern society. As an example, Washington's colleges and universities devote significant resources to remedial courses in subjects such as math, reading, and writing. And, a 1995 survey showed that 55 percent of businesses in our state have trouble finding new employees with the skills for jobs that are available now. School-to-Work Transition offers all students challenging, relevant academics and meaningful work-based learning experiences. School-to-Work Transition will improve student preparation for college *and* for the career of their choice.

**FICTION:** School-to-Work Transition is another program for low-achieving students.

**FACT:** At the heart of School-to-Work Transition are two goals. The first is to improve the quality and relevance of education for all students. The second is to improve student knowledge of and access to career opportunities. School-to-Work Transition breaks down barriers between academic and vocational learning and provides each with the best aspects of the other. School-to-Work, as a capstone to education reform, prepares all students to meet high academic standards coming to our schools.

**FICTION:** School-to-Work Transition will track students, based on industry demand, into inferior programs of study with low academic standards and dead-end, low-skill jobs.

**FACT:** School-to-Work Transition does not "track" students into occupations based on local industry demand. Students' career paths are not chosen for them, nor are students asked to make a final high-stakes occupational decision. Rather, career pathways developed by local school districts provide students with opportunities to explore many career options within broad subject areas. These subject areas include arts and communications, health, and science and technology. Pathways enable students to learn how their course work is relevant to *their* interests. Students are free to change their career pathway any time.

**FICTION:** Confidential student data will be collected and given to anyone expressing an interest in it.

**FACT:** Limited data will be collected to determine the impact and effectiveness of local School-to-Work Transition efforts. Personal information about students will *not* be shared without student or parent permission. That would violate the federal privacy law.

**FICTION:** School-to-Work Transition is just another federally controlled job training program.

**FACT:** The national School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provides *limited* seed money for states and communities to design and set up *their own* School-to-Work Transition activities. School-to-Work Transition actually began in Washington State in 1993 with a few local demonstration projects. Currently, three-quarters of the state's 296 school districts—representing more than 90 percent of our state's students—are preparing School-to-Work Transition activities. These efforts build on existing local programs such as Tech Prep, cooperative education, and apprenticeship. Local district participation in School-to-Work Transition is voluntary.

**FICTION:** Young people will not want to participate in School-to-Work Transition activities.

**FACT:** Young people want relevant learning opportunities and want a chance to learn both in school and the job. For example, a 1996 summer survey of youths in Seattle showed young people want classes that connect to the real world with hands-on and job experiences. Students want School-to-Work Transition in their schools and are willing to participate in activities after school. Additionally, in a series of focus groups held around Washington State, students said an education system that includes School-to-Work Transition is desirable. A recent national survey of teens showed similar results.

**FICTION:** Local School-to-Work Transition initiatives must implement national skills standards, and all students will be nationally certified.

**FACT:** School-to-Work Transition in Washington State is not based on federal skill standards or certifications. However, educators are working with community members such as business and labor to help students understand the requirements of future occupations that interest them. The state is developing skill standards for several critical and emerging industries and occupations. These standards will identify the skill needs of employers and clarify how classroom learning relates to those skills. Knowing what's expected is a first step in helping students make good decisions about courses and their future careers.